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CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

PART 222.

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1887.

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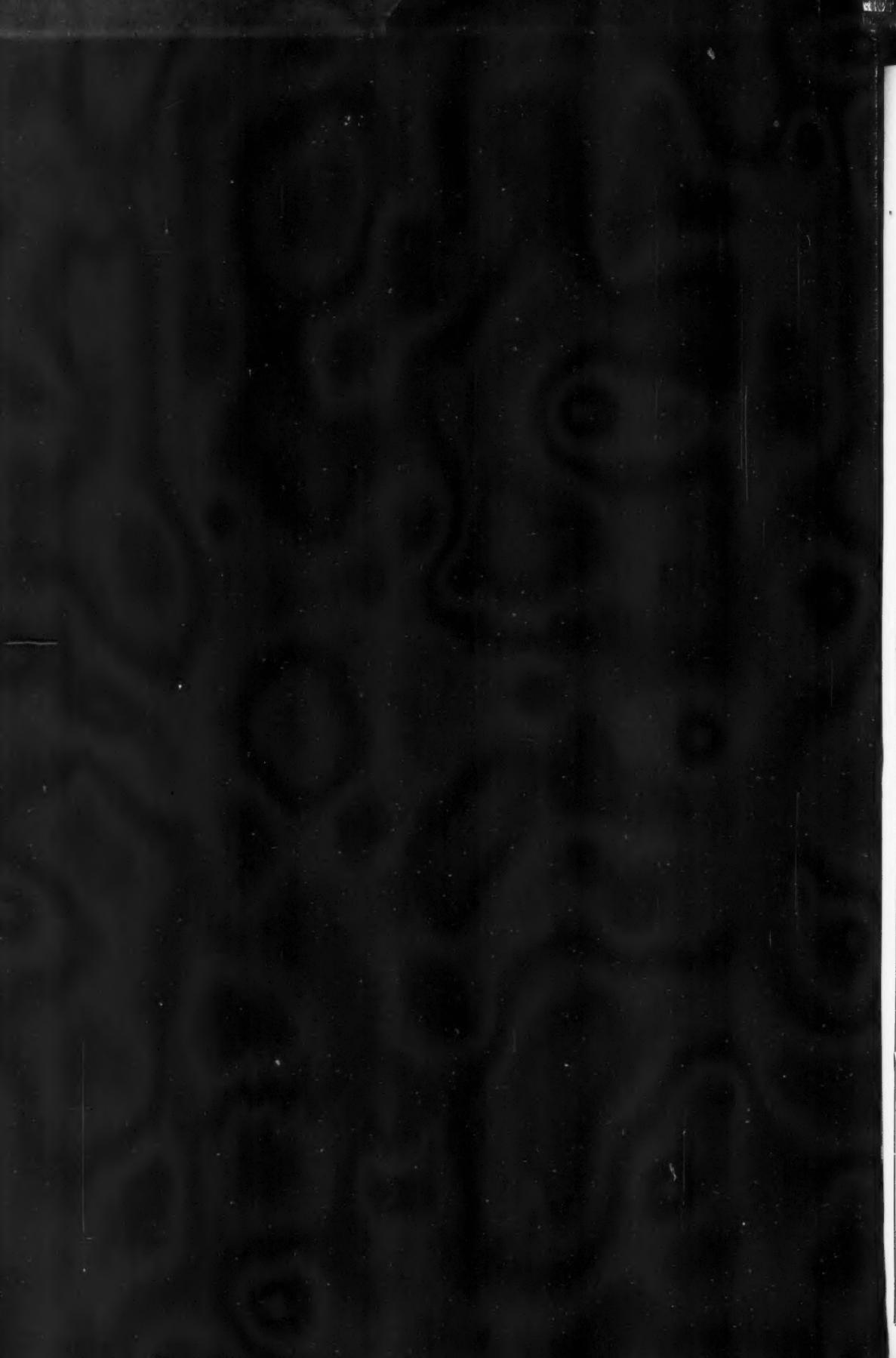


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SATURDAY, MAY 7, 1887.

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GRETCHEN.

By the Author of "Dame Durden," "My Lord Conceit,"
"Darby and Joan," "Corinna," etc.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER VII. "FAITH OR REASON."

THE next day Neale Kenyon went up to London. The small house-party at the Abbey did exactly as they pleased—the young hostess seeming, if anything, gayer, more capricious, and more brilliant even than her wont.

Yet she herself knew that a restlessness, an irritation, a curious dissatisfaction, were ever at work in her heart now. The fact she allowed; the reason she ignored. Self-knowledge and self-depreciation are not very comfortable companions, she confessed to herself as the idle, pleasure-filled days drifted by, each bringing in its train additional ennui and additional discontent.

It angered her excessively to think that one man, and one of the very few men in whom she had ever condescended to interest herself, should have so thoroughly fathomed her nature, and should so hold it in his power to show her its weakness and egotism. She had seen him once or twice as she rode or drove, but she had not spoken to him since the night that had first made him her guest. She heard his praises constantly; his energy, his zeal, his unselfishness were themes on every tongue. They seemed to set him further and further away from her. She felt, for the first time, how useless and frivolous her own life was, and yet she resolved not to alter it, lest he should take the change as due to his influence, or advice.

Sometimes, as she thought of his words on the terrace, of the look in the grand

grey eyes, she told herself she hated him—hated him for showing how contemptible was her spoilt artificial life, and the very coldness and immobility on which she prided herself.

"It is ridiculous," she would say in her heart, "to suppose I could learn from the poor and the unhappy what the world has never taught me! Those who are ignorant are passively content—they know no better. Peasants who work in the fields and grub away in their cottage-gardens, think themselves in Paradise if anyone gives them a sovereign, or a dinner—perhaps, of the two, they would prefer the dinner—and overwhelm one with gratitude for unlimited roast beef and beer. Now, no educated person would do that; and yet Mr. Lyle and his followers would say: 'See, here are content and gratitude!' I can have the sovereigns and the stalled ox every day of my life if I please, but certainly can neither feel nor express gratitude for them; therefore he looks upon me as a discontented person, and one unworthy of the so-called blessings of life. I suppose beer and beef would be a blessing, if I were hungry; but I have never had an opportunity of being—that."

Then she laughed softly at her own reasoning, and took up her big red parasol and went out on to the lawn, where the garden-chairs were placed under the great cedars.

Lady Breresford was there reading, and Alexis ordered the servants to bring them out some tea and fruit, and took a seat beside her friend.

"Everyone is out," she said, "but ourselves. It is really too hot for any exertion. I wonder Fay never gets tired. She is full of life."

"Yes," said her aunt. "The child never has an idle moment."

"You say that," answered Alexis with a little smile, "as if it were a reproach. But Fay is young yet. She will grow wiser by the time she has worked off some of her superfluous energy. Now I——"

"You!" interposed Lady Breresford. "I never remember that you had any to work off—and I have known you a good many years!"

"That," said Alexis, "is a melancholy fact. Positively I begin to feel old. There seems so much to remember——"

"So long as you don't look old," interrupted Lady Breresford, "there is nothing to lament. As for remembering—you have always told me it was too much exertion. Have you changed your mind on that point?"

"Have I a mind to change? That is the question," she asked ironically. "I begin to doubt it. I was almost told so the other night."

"Who was so bold?" asked her friend, wonderingly. "Not a man, surely?"

"Would you call Mr. Lyle a man?"

"Most decidedly. But was he so audacious?"

"I don't know," the girl answered thoughtfully, "that I should call him that—exactly. He was only candid."

"Well," said Lady Breresford, "you always profess to admire candour—but perhaps you only meant in theory."

"It is apt to do away with comfortable impressions," said Alexis. "Mr. Lyle has what I should call a disturbing influence upon one. Did you not think so?"

"He never gave me an opportunity of judging," said the elder lady demurely. "He evidently found it more agreeable to find fault with you."

"Oh," she said indifferently, "that is his vocation. I expected it."

"You know you did nothing of the sort," said her friend quickly. "No man has ever yet dared tell you that you are anything but an enchantress. And," she added, smiling a little, "I wonder where even Mr. Lyle found his courage."

"Must I again remind you that fault-finding is his vocation?" said Alexis coldly. "He has nothing but contempt for the frivolities of fashionable life. I am not surprised. It is a paltry thing—a jumble of discordants—a make-believe at enjoyment that is weariness, and pleasure that is bitter in its after taste. Wasted time, wasted regret, wasted energy, and all as the result of a mortal nature endowed with reason, imagination, capacity. It

does look contemptible when one thinks of it. Even you must acknowledge that."

"Even I?" and Lady Breresford laughed. "I am not given to self-reproach, and I have not lived entirely for pleasure, though you appear to consider me a very worldly person. I have had a fair share of intellectual enjoyment, though I have not cultured my nature, as you have yours, at the expense of all that is simple, and homely, and natural. You are dissatisfied with everything and everybody. There lies the shadow that haunts your life. Perhaps it is the phantom of a higher self that you deny. I think so, sometimes."

"I have no higher self," said the girl with sudden bitterness, "or else I have been deaf to its voice so long, that now I never hear it."

"You have a long future before you," said Lady Breresford, gravely. "Why do you always speak as if the past were everything?"

"Because I hate to look forward," she cried with sudden passion. "I have all I want materially; but this discontent; this craving after something which neither mind, nor soul, nor sense can satisfy; this it is that I dread in years to come. I am not old; I am not stupid; and the world is good enough to call me fair; but for all that I can't say I have ever enjoyed an hour of simple happiness, nor can I imagine myself doing so."

"You are unfortunate," said Lady Breresford gravely. "Perhaps you expect too much of everyone and everything. And then," she added, looking scrutinisingly at the delicate, lovely face, "you give your mind all to do, your affections—nothing."

"Is that my fault?" said Alexis. "I am fastidious, I know. Can I help that? It is my nature—myself, so to say. I think I am more to be pitied than blamed."

"So do I," said her friend frankly. "If you could fall in love, now?"

Alexis gave a little impatient movement. A shadow fell upon the grass under the great swaying cedar-boughs. As she half turned her graceful head, she saw Adrian Lyle standing behind her chair. The little start she gave was one of real, not affected surprise.

"How did you come?" she asked, as she gave him her hand. "We did not see you."

"No; I know that," he said, turning to greet Lady Breresford. "I was on my way to the house when I saw you on the

lawn, so I took the liberty of joining you. I wanted to ask your help in a case where womanly help will be of greatest service. I hope I may count on yours."

Lady Brerford looked somewhat amused.

"Miss Kenyon was just lamenting her uselessness," she said. "Your request is quite opportune."

"On the contrary," said Alexis, with her coldest air, "I never interfere with parish matters. I leave all that to my housekeeper."

"This matter," said Adrian Lyle, looking at her coldly and sternly, "is not one that is quite within the capacity of a housekeeper. It needs womanly skill and refinement, not ostentatious charity. Excuse me if I have made a mistake in thinking I might count upon you."

"What is the case?" asked Lady Brerford; "may I hear it?"

Adrian turned aside with an air of indifference, and poured out some tea which one of the footmen had just set on the rustic table. A hot flush burned on her cheek, a sense as of personal affront rankled in her heart at the memory of that look from the young clergyman's eyes. Yet she listened eagerly for his next words.

"The story is very simple," he said gravely. "A young widow, married but two years, is left in absolute poverty by the sudden death of her husband. She is a lady—well educated, delicately nurtured, and now seeks employment of some kind by which to support herself independently. I thought, I hoped, that among Miss Kenyon's many friends something could be found for her. She is a good musician and linguist, thoroughly refined, and would, I am sure, be of service to anyone needing a governess."

"Do you think I need one?" asked Adrian, with a little slighting laugh. "I assure you I detest the whole species. I have had ample experience of them. And I would never recommend any friend to inflict upon her family the discomforts I have undergone. As a rule they are a mistake, an intolerable nuisance, a—"

"Pardon me, Miss Kenyon," interposed Adrian Lyle, almost angrily. "If fortune has favoured you above your fellow sisters, that gives you no right to abuse them. You surely can't mean what you say. Your very knowledge of the world must have shown you that there are misfortunes possible even to the rich and well-born. But

where there is no sympathy one cannot expect assistance. Pray forget that I troubled you on this subject."

He spoke courteously; Alexis Kenyon was conscious of deserving his implied rebuke, but she would not acknowledge this.

"You should apply to Lady Brerford," she said, handing him a cup of tea as she spoke. "She is full of the charity you admire and extol, and I believe she thinks people are really grateful for her trouble on their behalf. For my part, I am sure that to benefit any one is the very surest way of making an enemy."

"I can quite imagine," said Adrian Lyle, "that it is possible to do so. But to avoid it is the secret of true charity."

"It is a secret," she said, coolly, "that I have never learnt. And I am not sure that I care to do so. I am far too indifferent as to how people regard me. I certainly don't like to see them hungry, or thirsty, or in rags; but, if I give them food and clothes, I object to being overwhelmed with thanks for altering a state of things that mainly offends my taste and sense of fitness. It would not please me in the least to be hailed as a benefactress, simply because I dislike dirt and want in the abstract."

"You have made quite a fine art of selfishness," said Adrian Lyle ironically. "I wonder you don't write a treatise on it for the benefit of philanthropists."

She laughed, the clear, low, amused laughter that always irritated and annoyed him.

"Perhaps I will," she said, "some day. I have but scant pity for incompetence, failure, or stupidity. Those are the true secrets of poverty."

"I differ from you," said Adrian Lyle. "Poverty is a misfortune that sometimes the wisest amongst us cannot avert. It falls too often on the helpless, the young, the old, the suffering, from faults or crimes for which they have been in no way responsible."

"But they are links in the chain of incapacity or crime, even if they only show its result; and the result springs from the cause I have mentioned. Every theory has its first principle, so I am still right in the main point."

"Miss Kenyon," he said, smiling despite himself, "this is not the first time I have discovered that it is dangerous to argue with you. I bow to the inevitable. I shall not again attempt to plead the cause of the unfortunate in your ears."

"You take a romantic and impartial view of them and their cases," she said coolly. "Even look at the one in point! A man has no right to marry unless he can afford it. It is senseless and criminal, too, to entail upon a weak woman, or on helpless children the fate which you say has overtaken this woman. But men are always selfish and inconsiderate where their passions are concerned."

"You make no allowance, then," he said, "for love; its strength, or desire, or fatality."

"Oh," said Lady Beresford, with evident amusement, "Miss Kenyon does not believe in love at all."

"Not as I have found it," said the girl scornfully.

"Mr. Lyle will, perhaps, favour us with his views as to its reality, or uses," suggested Lady Beresford.

"Madam," said the young clergyman, with a grave bow, "you lay too hard a task upon me. Besides, to one of my calling and profession——"

"I hope," she interrupted hastily, "you do not go in for the celibacy of the clergy."

A sudden flush mounted to his brow, as he caught the cool interrogative glance of Alexis Kenyon's dark eyes.

"No," he said, "far from it. But love, in the acceptance of the world that Miss Kenyon graces, has a different creed and code to that which I would give it."

"And what," asked Alexis ironically, "would be your creed and definition?"

He hesitated for a moment, reading only too plainly the defiance and arrogance of her glance.

"I have seen it," he said, "make the humblest lot a blessing, even as its want has made the noblest and most fortunate a curse. I would define it as the common need of a common humanity, without which no life is complete, no heart satisfied. Not a thing of the senses, the imagination, the caprice of time, or place, or opportunity, such as the fashionable world miscalls its fleeting fancies, but a true and elevating devotion to something pure and worthy; a feeling that gives shape and force to our dreams of happiness, and lifts the soul to purer hopes and higher ambitions: that alleviates misfortunes, that ennobles Life; that sanctifies and comforts even Life's cruellest enemy—Death."

There was a moment's silence. It was broken by Alexis Kenyon's cold and slighting laugh.

"You are quite poetical, Mr. Lyle," she said. "What you say sounds all very pretty and romantic, but I should define love very differently. I should call it a momentary illusion, which captivates the senses, and renders a person utterly incapable of judging the captivator by any real or rational method. Were it anything different it would last, but it never does. I have never seen a love, however passionate and adoring, outlive one single year of its disenchanter—marriage. This proves what I say, that people are only loved for what one imagines in them, not for what they really are. I grant you, love may live where adverse fate has parted the lovers. They have still their illusion intact, and all the great love tragedies and histories of the world have been, so far, happy. But if Juliet had lived to cook Romeo's dinners, or Beatrice to iron Dante's shirts, they would have had no history, and their love would have turned out as commonplace as our nineteenth-century prose."

"Really, my dear," said Lady Beresford, "you have the most singular ideas."

"They are quite true, if you would only search the question out, instead of accepting it as a truism. Mr. Lyle is too unworldly to do so; he keeps his illusion still in some secret chamber of his heart; but he may take my word for it, that his ideal is only a woman, like any other woman, with nothing of the angel about her, save what his fancy pleases to bestow."

Adrian Lyle looked straight at the beautiful, cold face; his own was somewhat pale. A vision of Gretchen rose before him—Gretchen in her beautiful youth; her innocent faith; her simple happiness. Would love ever be to her what this cruel and merciless dissector of human passions called it? The thought stung him with the sharpness of recognised possibility. It seemed to thrust away the sentiment, the sacredness, the glory of that passion which had been to her nature as sunlight to the folded buds, as the marvels of assured divinity to the credulous devotee.

"I am happy, Miss Kenyon," he said, "in having illusions such as you describe; and I am sorry that even your youth and beauty have brought you no faith in the sincerity of emotions you must have awakened."

"Do you wonder at it?" she asked suddenly, and looked at him with her strange, half-mournful eyes—eyes from which the

longings and discontent of her strange nature looked wistfully forth on the world she despised, and the men she scorned.

For a moment he returned that look, trying to fathom the real mystery of her dissatisfied soul. But he saw no further than others had seen; he read no more than others had read.

Yet suddenly her eyes drooped. A certain softness and regretfulness came over her face.

"I really would be tender-hearted—if I could," she said. "Perhaps it is my Russian blood—I do not know; only certainly I lack compassion."

"Lacking that," said Adrian Lyle, "means that you lack all that makes womanhood divine."

Something in his look and tone brought back the hardness and coldness she had for a moment laid aside.

"Have you found it divine?" she asked mockingly. "If so, do not seek disillusion through the prosaic portals of marriage. The clergy of all men should be celibate. They believe in angels."

Lady Breresford had left her seat and wandered a short distance off, and was feeding one of the peacocks with crumbs of cake. Adrian Lyle suddenly bent forward and looked, straight into the beautiful, baffling face of his companion.

"Miss Kenyon," he said earnestly, "may I speak to you seriously and without offence?"

"Certainly," she said with equal gravity. "I have not the slightest objection to your converting me, if you can."

He put aside the challenge without remark.

"You do yourself a great injustice," he said, "when you speak of all that is best and noblest in life in so slighting a manner. I have no wish to preach to you—far from it; but it pains me to hear maxims so worldly, convictions so cruel, uttered by such young lips. You yourself confess you are not happy. Then why deny every possibility that might make you so? Do you think all those gifts of mind and body that you possess deserve no gratitude, or will exact no account? Do your sophisms, clever as they are, really satisfy your heart? Does the denial of the natural softness and requirements of womanhood find greater content in the development of your intellect, than it would in the awakening of your sympathies? I am sure it does not."

"I have never attempted to deny that

I am not happy," she said softly, as she slowly pulled the petals of the rose that had fallen from her gown. "But can any of your creeds teach me to become so?"

"I think," he said, "they might, if only you would believe them. But you dissect even faith as mercilessly as the flower you hold in your hand."

"Faith in the abstract—yes. How are you to convince me that I am right in believing a certain doctrine which another person, equally educated and clear-judging, holds in utter abhorrence? Religion is a mere matter of accident. We are not responsible for our parentage—therefore not for our faith. We are taught in childhood to believe such a creed, to worship such a divinity; we do it. Our minds are plastic clay, and take individual impressions. Are we responsible for them, or to blame because in after years our intellect rebels at what our duty compelled us to accept? True, the generality of mankind never even think of stepping out of their groove: it is much easier to tread the beaten track than to cut out a new one for ourselves. I have investigated many forms of religion. I can't say I have found any to satisfy me. The Church professes to do a great deal, but I doubt if it has ever done any real or permanent good. All great truths of science and knowledge have been arrived at by man's own dogged resolves, not by any help of ecclesiasticism; rather, indeed, has it been the way of its rulers and directors to shut humanity into complete and unquestioning ignorance. True, we have plenty of freedom now, but that is because thought and reason have been too strong for even priesthood to combat."

"Your arguments," said Adrian Lyle, "are of course the outcome of minds that are doing their best to overthrow the growth of any faith. But we have drifted far away from our starting point. Can nothing give you a little more content in life as it is, a little more hope in what it may be? The very extent of your discontent is proof that your soul cries out for food that philosophy cannot supply. You refuse your feelings full play. You argue and dissect every sensation that meets you, or that is awakened in you. But, believe me, it is the simple things of life that awaken its purest feelings. A child's faith, a woman's tenderness, an act of self-denial, a deed of unrecognised heroism—these are capable of giving purer happiness, of teaching nobler morality than the cleverest

treatise of philosophy, the most perfect form of external religion. I am not good at reasoning. I only know the truth and actuality of certain convictions which have led me to a profession I but imperfectly uphold. That I am the happier for doing so, I frankly confess. I wish—" he added earnestly as he looked at the fair, cold face, "I could make you so."

For a moment she was silent; then looked at him with her coldest and most critical air. "It would not be possible," she said, "I am one of Nature's mistakes. Nothing will change me."

"Yes," he said suddenly, as he rose from his chair to take leave—"one thing. But I will not wish it you."

"And that one thing?" she questioned, smiling.

"Is a great sorrow—" he said, with a gravity that was almost compassionate.

MRS. SILAS B. BUNTHORP.

A STORY IN SIX CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

It was a night in May.

The music of the ball-room was borne on the heated, perfumed air, up through the well-staircase, to the gallery above.

"Doesn't it seem like Heaven, down there—and you and me up here in the darkness!"

The little white figure, kneeling on the floor of this upper gallery, with hand clasped round the balusters, peering down into the hall below, into which overflowed some of that ball-room radiance, turned to the other figure kneeling by her.

"Miss Coleridge!" exclaimed the little white figure again, this time more impatiently, for the sense of loneliness and neglect, and of being shut out from all the beautiful sights and sounds below, was growing stronger in her childish soul. "Isn't it lovely? Don't you smell the flowers?—and here we are up here!"

"A most indisputable fact!" said Miss Coleridge dryly.

But she was not unsympathetic. Her present position betrayed that, for she was risking her appointment, which she could ill afford to do, by yielding to her little pupil's entreaties to let her leave her bed, at this late hour of the night, to get a glimpse into the far off Fairyland beneath them.

"Poor little Peri!" she said with a touch of scorn in the amusement of her

dark eyes, as the child turned her face to her for sympathy.

"Peri? What's that?" asked the child fretfully.

"It was a poor little thing, who stood outside Paradise, knocking to be let in."

"And did she ever get in?" with plaintive eagerness.

Then the pretty, scornful eyes of the governess changed. She bent forward in the dusk of the spring night, and drew the child swiftly, and very tenderly, to her.

"I believe she did. And this is what she found inside that Paradise. She saw a great many grand-looking figures, who seemed like men, only she thought they were gods. They made a great fuss over her when she first got in. But they soon began to find out that they had made a mistake, by letting her in. For her dress rustled, and disturbed their after-dinner naps, and then they had to give her a chair, which rather crowded theirs. Besides, they found out that her face was always the same, and they even grew tired of its beauty. She ought to have been able to change the colour of her eyes, or give a new shape to her nose. But I think, perhaps, she felt most disappointment. They looked so grand, as they sat in the distant sunlight, with their button-holes. But, when she lived closely among them, she found out that they were only bundles of clothes, and cigars, and kid gloves. She tripped once, and clutching at the figure she thought the grandest, to save herself, it doubled up beneath her weight, and they both fell to the ground. But it only hurt her. He had but to be picked up again, and shaken and brushed a little, and his clothes looked as grand as ever. Oh! you little goose!" An indescribable change in her tones: "You are much better up here in the dark, with me!"

"I like to be with you, though that wasn't a pretty story at all. But it is dull sometimes. Do you think, if I had a mother like Maysie and Laura, I should be down there instead of up here?"

"Probably."

There was another change in the girl's tone. It was hard as steel.

"Now you are to come back to bed."

Hand in hand, the two flitted through the darkness and loneliness of this upper part of the house. All the servants were below, and these two—the little governess, in her work-a-day dress of brown merino, and the child, with her white wrapper flung over her bed-gown, had the place to themselves.

"You see we are not dressed for a party," said Miss Coleridge, with the scorn which had grown rather habitual to her since she had lived in this great house. "What a sensation we should cause if we suddenly appeared in the ball-room!"

The little girl laughed, childishly amused at the fancy, as her governess intended her to be.

"It would be fine. Mr. Aylmer said the other day, as he stood in the hall talking to Maysie, that he had never seen such a frock as yours before. He said it was a crime for any girl like you to wear it. You had just passed them. He did stare at you so."

"And where were you?" asked Miss Coleridge very severely, taking no outward notice of the speech as it concerned herself.

"I had dropped my ball down the staircase and ran after it. I didn't know they were there. I tried to hide behind the curtains, but he saw me just after he had said that. Maysie was very angry with me."

"I don't wonder. You were very disobedient."

"I only wanted my ball; and he asked who I was, and Maysie said, a protégée of theirs. What is a protégée?"

"A peg to hang people's cloaks of charity upon. Sometimes the cloak is so ample that it quite smothers the poor little peg. Hush! what is that?"

They had reached a passage which led down to the school-room part of the house, where Miss Coleridge and her pupil lived and slept, almost as isolated from the other apartments as if they had been living in a separate house. The great front staircase passed the end of the passage which they themselves had just reached by a back flight. Sounds of feet running lightly up the great staircase, a few yards from them, fell on their startled ears. The child clung to her governess.

"It is Mrs. Englefield," she whispered in terror.

The little governess paled too, though more in sympathy for the child's dread; not for a second recognising the incongruity of connecting those light, quick feet with her employer's stout, majestic appearance.

"Come!" she exclaimed, with a most undignified rush towards their bed-room doors, which unfortunately lay on the other side of the school-room. But they were too late. A tall and remarkably handsome young man in immaculately-fitting clothes,

with a flower in his button-hole, turning into the passage from the great staircase, caught sight of the two figures flying through the moonlight, which lighted up this side of the house.

Inspired by some luckless spirit of mischief, or perhaps attracted by the curious resemblance between one of those fugitive figures and another which he had come to meet there, he dashed after them.

"I've found you out!" he exclaimed, laughingly catching at the child's golden hair. He was totally unprepared for the terror he caused.

The child clung to her governess with a stifled cry, while the governess herself, whose beauty had several times attracted his notice, coupled as it was with that strange resemblance, turned upon him with a desperate gasp.

"Oh, I say. I'm awfully sorry. I didn't mean to frighten—"

"You did not—frighten—us—at—all," said Miss Coleridge distinctly, with most unsteady voice. "You only made me jump a little, that's all."

"I beg your pardon," began the young man again, ashamed at the disastrous effect of his little jest, and yet very much inclined to laugh at the deliberate disregard for truth displayed by this moral instructress of youth. "By Jove!" with a start, turning towards the great staircase.

It was his turn now to betray the most undisguised alarm and consternation. Miss Coleridge turned sharply too.

Up the staircase, came the frou-frou of silk and the soft rattle of the pearl fringe of a ball-dress.

Some one else was also coming to this isolated portion of the house.

It was not the first time it had been used for lovers' meetings.

In one flash of thought Miss Coleridge understood. It was a tryst. And seeing the young man, she knew who the other would be, who was to share it with him.

"On your honour, Mr. Aylmer, don't tell her!" she exclaimed breathlessly, looking up into the young man's face. There was no hope of reaching their bed-rooms. "Quick, Maggie, the school-room cupboard."

The next moment the young man was alone, with the click of a lock sounding in the room behind him, and the frou-frou of the dainty ball-dress, which had reached the passage at the same second, rustling the air before him.

He stood still, looking at this new figure

fluttering towards him, all white in the moonlight.

Then a great rush of delight at the sight of it made him forget all the awkwardness of the situation. He went hastily forward, and caught two daintily-gloved little hands in his.

"I was afraid you would forget—or not dare," he exclaimed, looking down with eyes full of passionate admiration into the lovely face of Maysie Englefield, his hostess's eldest daughter.

"I never forget, sir. But I almost did not dare. Mother is growing so dreadfully sharp-sighted."

His face darkened. It was very bitter to be reduced to this clandestine love-making, and all because his friends, who were always promising to do something for him, had not yet begun. If only he were rich or lucky, Mrs. Englefield—

"Do let my hand go, Jack. Anybody can see us from the staircase. It looks so silly to have you staring at me like an owl in the moonlight," she exclaimed, in the laughing insolence and impatience of her beauty. She was fond enough of him to slip out of the ball-room to meet him here alone; but she did not want to be found out. "Come into the school-room. We shan't be seen there."

He dropped her hands as if he had been shot—a sudden recollection that the school-room had a capacious cupboard overwhelming him. For Maysie's own sake it was a risk to let her go in there. How could he tell whether the child would not betray them at the first opportunity? while, of course, it was the governess's duty to expose such escapades as these, to the authorities.

"No; I'm not going to stay out here," in answer to a stammering mumble. "The servants will see. Besides, that's Miss Coleridge's room down there; she will hear us talking."

The young man glanced with helpless dismay towards the door so innocently closed at the end of the passage.

"If only she were there!" he groaned inwardly. "It's so much jollier out here, darling. There's the moonlight, you know, and it's all dark in that school-room."

"I never knew you were afraid of the dark before. If you are, I'm going. I'm sure the next waltz—"

He followed her rapidly into the school-room. The fear of losing even a moment of that snatched meeting overcoming all other doubts.

Now, if any man has tried to make love with the full consciousness that other ears save the legitimate recipients of his rhapsodies, are listening, he may form some idea of what Jack Aylmer felt under his present circumstances.

To make the situation still more trying, Miss Englefield had gone over to the window where the moonlight fell full through the raised blinds. The cupboard was close to this window. Aylmer, not daring to make any further objections, followed her there. The thought of betraying the real cause of his reluctance never entered his head. Miss Coleridge had appealed to his honour, while the evident fright of the two, ludicrously out of place as it seemed, for he guessed that they had only been taking a stolen glance at the festivities, made their betrayal still more impossible.

"It's a lovely evening," he said desperately, feeling a mad desire to draw her to him, as the moonlight touched her into pale loveliness; but resisting it, as he thought of the cupboard.

"A very original remark; only I've heard something like it before. You might have said that downstairs, without making me run the risk—"

"Hush, for goodness—I don't mean that," at sight of her astonished face. "Of course I don't mean that. It's so awfully jolly having you up here" (in a whisper), "that I don't know what I am saying."

"So it seems. Don't stand so close, Jack. There, you have snapped off one of my flowers. I didn't come here to be kissed," a note of impatience in her clear voice, "and, for goodness' sake, don't go whispering in my ear like that. Why can't you speak aloud, instead of buzzing away like a great bumble bee?"

She laughed, but there was a jar of something wrong in the laugh, as there had been in the words. It was a new mood, this hard impatience.

Jack Aylmer stepped back a yard from her, instinctively feeling the discord, and yet, for the second, more actively conscious of a most unmistakeable, though quickly-suppressed giggle, in the cupboard behind him. That little governess was enjoying her part of the situation.

"I must go now," said Miss Englefield, who, rearranging a fold in her ball-dress, had heard nothing. "My next waltz is with Lord Maitland. I daren't cut him out with mother in the room."

The young man followed her in silence.

The mention of that other man's name had raised a whirlwind of doubt, fear, and jealous anger in his heart. He lingered on the landing till he was sure that she had rejoined, unperceived, her mother's guests; for, even in the midst of his doubt of her faith, he loved her too well to let her get into trouble by being seen with him. Before he had reached the middle of the flight a white rose was flung over the balusters from above. It was the rose which he had broken off Maysie's dress. It struck him on the cheek, and fell at his feet. He caught it up tenderly, angry at the profanation. The petals fell, a shower of scented snowflakes, on the stair before him.

He glanced swiftly up, with a sudden sinking of his heart, as if that frail flower had been an omen. But the landing above was empty.

CHAPTER II.

A WEEK later, Miss Coleridge came out of a house in a street some distance from Grosvenor Walk, where the Englefields lived. Her face was rather pale, and she glanced about her nervously, as if a little afraid of being seen, for the house she had just left, belonged to a woman with whose name all London had rung a few years before. It was a pitiful story—yesterday, a queen of society; to-day, an outcast. The husband she had wronged had revenged himself by refusing to take proceedings of divorce. The man for whom she had sinned, who would have married her at first, had at last left her for another whose love was honour. The father, who had idolised her, had cursed her. The child she had borne, had been brought up an alien from her.

Perhaps it was very wrong of Miss Coleridge to speak to such a woman, and yet when, one day, she had waylaid her and pleaded with such bitter tears for some news of the child she had herself deserted, Miss Coleridge had yielded. To-day, she had been to see her. Miss Coleridge was good, and as sweet as she was good, which combination is a rare one. She was good enough not to fear being harmed by touching the hand of such a woman; but she was young, and it is hard sometimes to have the courage of one's convictions, even when one is old. At the sight of a young man coming down the street, as she left the house, she turned the colour of a poppy, and her first impulse was to run away; but it was too late. He had seen her. So, with a certain

uplifting of the head, which gave dignity to her decidedly childish appearance, she went bravely forward.

Mr. Aylmer had looked really shocked when he first caught sight of her; but when they met, his handsome face expressed only polite interest. She bowed, and would have passed on; but he turned and walked by her side. Having nothing particular to do, the thought of a stroll with the Englefields' pretty little governess was tempting. Besides, he was really curious to know what had taken her to that house.

"Do you mind my going a little way with you?"

She flushed faintly, her eyes falling before his, which were so flatteringly pleading, though his words and voice were so simply commonplace.

"I don't mind—if you have nothing better to do," she said with a shy demureness, which made her ten times prettier.

A flash of amused conquest lighted the young man's face. But then he had felt certain of her consent.

"That would be difficult. I see you so rarely, that, when I get the chance of a talk, I value it accordingly," admiring the pretty flush he caught again upon the half-averted cheek. "How is it you and that little pupil of yours are never to be seen?"

It was difficult to answer such a question without betraying the harshness and unkindness of her employer to the lonely little child, whose mother was an outcast. The child's grandfather, who lived with the Englefields, and from whom they expected great things, he being Mr. Englefield's uncle, had sent for Maggie about a year ago, from the home her father had found for her, and where her life had been even sadder than it was now. The Englefields had been furious at his sending for her, fearing that he should return to the old affections and leave her the fortune that should have been her mother's. But the old man, beyond sending for her and providing her with a governess, had done nothing more. He never asked to see her, and Mrs. Englefield, knowing the advantage of keeping them apart, did her best to widen the gulf between them. Miss Coleridge saw through it all, and her eyes grew bright and indignant now. The young man wondered what she was thinking of, and thought if she were only decently dressed—like Maysie, for instance—

No! even she could not hold a candle to Maysie. His thoughts, which never

really wandered far from her, returned in full force now.

"It was awfully mean of you hiding yourselves in that cupboard, the other night," he said, with a laugh, which had a touch of self-consciousness in it. He had a strong suspicion that he must have looked rather like a fool. "I hope you weren't found out."

"I hope you weren't," with a malicious light in her eyes.

"No. But could you hear what we said?"

"I—I don't think you said very much," she said, with a gravity which he found suspicious.

"It was an awkward situation," laughing, though he coloured a little. He hated feeling ridiculous, but he had too much good sense to show it. "And it was very good of you not to tell!"

"Did you think I would?" with quick, fine disdain.

"Oh well—of course, I mean, Mrs. Englefield might expect. You know she does not quite approve of our engagement."

She looked at him with sudden pity, faintly touched with scorn.

"What were you going to say?" he asked, a little startled by the look, as she turned away again.

"Nothing. Only—I hope you found the rose. I picked it up after you left."

"Why did you throw it after me, like that?" he asked hastily, moved by her tone, and those old doubts about Lord Maitland.

"I don't know. I did it on the impulse of the moment. It was a pity it broke—" she stopped abruptly. If he were not clever enough to read the warning of that broken flower, she would not explain; while a sudden thought, that he might put an interpretation on the act personal to herself, made her hot with shame. She knew how much he was spoilt by women. He might think she had been only trying to attract him. The fear made her stop. It was time to get rid of him.

"I think I would like you to leave me," she said a little stiffly.

They were close to Grosvenor Walk. Mr. Aylmer thought he understood her reason. He was too much a man of the world not to know that Mrs. Englefield would probably object to her governess walking with even an ineligible like himself.

"As you wish," he said quietly. Then as he looked down into her face, and

noticed its beauty and youth, which a certain delicacy of tint made even more youthful than it was, a sudden sense of her position in the world struck him. Fictionally independent, yet really totally dependent on her employer's favour and the world's opinion, it seemed a shame not to give her a word of warning. The girls of his world, at her age, would have parents and friends to protect them from the danger of making the acquaintance of disreputable personages.

"You must not be very angry with me," he said, with the gentleness which was one of his most dangerous charms; "but I know what a generous heart will make a person do sometimes for the unfortunate. But you are so young, that, if you were my sister, I could not feel it more my duty to warn you against mixing yourself up with people like Lady Arundel."

"It is very good of you," she interrupted hurriedly, flushing hotly, "but—oh please, let me go! There is Miss Englefield."

She snatched away her hand, and hurried off down a side street, leaving Mr. Aylmer, with the full consciousness that he had been standing, holding Miss Coleridge's hand in the most loverlike fashion, to face Miss Englefield and her mother. He roused himself and walked on towards them. He raised his hat, half-stopping to join them, and met only a cold, steady gaze from Mrs. Englefield, which seemed to pierce, like steel, through his brain. Maysie's face was turned away. He only caught sight of the scarlet blush, which had dyed even her throat; for she was still young enough to be ashamed, and then they passed on.

He stood still, stunned, dazed by this cut direct—society's guillotine, with which she rids herself of useless or inconvenient acquaintance.

The rose had fallen at last.

The little governess's warning had not been a vain one.

CHAPTER III.

THAT same evening he received a note from Mrs. Englefield. It was curt and cruel in the extreme. It forbade him to enter the house again. And the excuse she gave was so utterly ridiculous, so shameless, in its effort to seize upon any trifles to break off the acquaintance, that even he, maddened by rage and pain, could not help laughing.

"A man who could trifle with the affections of a young girl in the dependent

position of Miss Coleridge, tempting her to forget propriety as well as her duty, is not a fit companion for my daughters. I have heard before how much you admired her, and how you seized every opportunity of speaking to her in my house. I did not think, however, that it had arrived at clandestine meetings. Out of pity to Miss Coleridge, I will give her another chance. But you will—”

Here Jack Aylmer uttered a violent imprecation, and tore the note into twenty pieces. Then repenting, with a sudden, foolish wish that the end might be kinder, he picked up the pieces and spent half-an-hour putting them together again. He might have spared himself the trouble.

“And, lest you should not be honourable enough to keep out of Maysie’s way, I shall keep the strictest guard over her.”

“And she will, too. Not a chance of a letter, or a word, or even a look—don’t I know it of old ?”

But the worst was to come.

“The dear child herself sees her folly, and has, I am glad to say, consented to marry Lord Maitland.”

This was it, then. As if he could not have seen all along ! It came upon him now like a flash of light, blinding him with its mortification, and rage, and despair. He had been the cat’s-paw. But for him Maitland would never have visited at the house. He had been encouraged till the latter had been secured. Then—he was cast aside as an old glove.

The blow was as great as if such a thing were unheard of, instead of happening every day in his world. He would have gone straight off to Maitland that night, but remembered that he had started for abroad the same day, called away by the dangerous illness of a near relation. Then he remembered, too, that Maitland was a faithful friend and an honourable man after his powers; and besides, Maitland did not know that there had been this half engagement between them. For Maysie’s sake, Aylmer had kept it even from his friend.

Then his wrath fell upon the innocent cause of his trouble, and his anger was as hot against Miss Coleridge as if his being found with her had been the real cause of Mrs. Englefield’s treatment of him. He forgot the youth and loveliness which had excited his pity; he forgot the innocent eyes which had tempted him to become her protector; he forgot everything, except that it was only her almost remarkable

likeness to Maysie, which had attracted him at all, at least, so it seemed to him now.

“I always told Maysie that I only admired her because she was the same height and had just the same colouring, and to think that that little governess has got me into this trouble, when I was only doing my best to serve her !” he groaned between whiffs at the cigar, to which solace he had resorted in the depths of his despair.

But as the dark, weary hours dragged themselves into the light of the morning, he grew more hopeful. He would not give Maysie up without one fight for her. He would see her once, at least, to find out if this were really her will as well as her mother’s. If fate and Mrs. Englefield proved too much for him, he would appeal to his friend’s generosity. He would tell him how matters had stood between himself and Maysie, and pray from him the right and opportunity of an interview; “just to know the truth from her own lips.”

Aylmer was not a man to hesitate when he had made up his mind. He would have walked up to a cannon’s mouth if need had arisen, without a glance behind, and this cool pluck he carried into every affair of his life. From that moment began a kind of silent skirmishing between him and Mrs. Englefield. The season was at its height. Balls, dinners, receptions, out-of-door fêtes, followed each other every hour. Jack Aylmer, detrimental as he was as far as fortune was concerned, was asked, by virtue of his connections and their social position, everywhere.

Wherever he had a chance of meeting the Englefields he went. He kept a watch on every moment, in case it should contain the opportunity he wanted. But Mrs. Englefield was prepared for the attack, and mounted guard with such effect that he never advanced a single step towards the treasure she protected.

Maysie, herself, either through fear of her mother, or a heartless coquetry, never helped him. If she did not cut him, she did as badly. She would smile and bow to him when they met, and then fling herself into the flirtations and excitement of the hour, without another glance in his direction. She obeyed her mother, by never giving him a dance, and as they never met except in the brilliant crowds of social gatherings, where she was always either surrounded by friends or partners, or was guarded by her mother, the opportunity of

appealing to her heart, in which he still believed in, never came. A week went by, and Aylmer grew desperate. Maitland was still away. Sometimes he was tempted to write, but the impossibility of putting what he felt on paper, stopped him. Besides, he was reluctant to try this last resource. Chivalry, which his worldly training had not yet wholly destroyed in a naturally generous heart, forbade him exposing Maysie, as he must necessarily do, if he appealed to the help of her accepted lover. He had written once or twice to her, but the letters had been returned. Whether she had even seen them, he could not tell. Sometimes the thought came to him, to make a confidante of some woman of their mutual acquaintance. But here his strong fear of ridicule made him give up the idea. He felt that he had been so shamelessly duped, that he did not like anyone else to know how hard he had been hit. Besides, his reputation for success in his flirtations, which, as with many other men of his temperament, was a source of pride to him, would suffer. These successful flirtations had been, in some sort of a way, a cynical revenge which he had taken on Society for its ill-concealed opinion that, though he was a valuable addition to its entertainments, he was totally outside the pale of its more serious matrimonial business. He did not feel inclined to openly acknowledge that once again Society had played with him—this time to his heart's bleeding.

No—there was not one of these women he could go to. One morning, just about this time, he happened to be wandering, depressed and bitter, down a long, straight street, in a quarter, which, while not reckoned one of the most fashionable, was still much frequented by rich people, who, if not in the first circles of Society, thought a good deal of themselves. Jack Aylmer who had been walking half unconsciously, was suddenly aroused to a sense of where he was, by seeing a young lady and a little girl standing before one of the houses looking into the dining room window. He recognised them at once. The figure of the elder girl, at the first moment, recalled so vividly Maysie Englefield. They were apparently absorbed in contemplation of something, and did not stir till he reached them. He then saw that they were admiring a very fine parrot, placed at the open window, who, through the bars of his cage, was also contemplating them with some favour.

"Good morning! Miss Coleridge," he said raising his hat, very much amused at

the two interested faces, the pretty governess looking only a little older child than her pupil. She turned with a start, all the light dying out of her face. Then with a very severe little bow, she took the child's hand, "We must go home now, Maggie," she said.

"Good-bye, Polly!" cried the child. "But we are coming again to-morrow."

The young man stood for a second, looking after them. "Poor little soul!" he thought with half-amused pity. "She must have got it hot, to give a fellow a bow like that. Ah!"

A sudden thought seized him. Why should not she help him? It was through her partly, that he lost Maysie. She had a tender little heart, witness her visiting that wretched woman, and her kindness to this poor neglected child—nay, even to himself. He could not help it; a sudden recollection of her tossing him that rose, came back to him. He was not conceited enough to think that she had fallen in love with him out and out, but it was only natural, that a girl, in the dull life she lived, should wish to attract his attention. He had been civil to her when they met, and perhaps—Jack Aylmer was accustomed to his civilities, accompanied as they were by such great beauty of person, being taken to mean more than they did.

What if he made friends with the little governess and persuaded her to help him, either by giving a letter direct into Maysie's hands, or speaking for him?

The more he thought of it, the more feasible it seemed. He stood there so long thinking over it that a prim-faced little old maid, who lived alone in that great house, and who had grown quite to look out for that sweet-faced little governess and her child-charge, as they came every day to look at her parrot, stepped out from behind the curtains where she was hiding, to see what he was about.

Catching sight of her, and recalled to the position, Jack Aylmer walked on.

"Oh! you sneak!" called out the parrot, who, with head on one side, had also been contemplating him with less favour than it had shown for its previous audience. Aylmer caught the words, and though they were but meaningless chatter, he actually started for a second, as he caught it.

"I hope he isn't, Polly! I hope he isn't," said the old maid, shaking her head. "But there's no accounting for such good-looking young men. And that pretty little governess is such a child! We must look after her, Polly."

OUR CONVENT.

"WOULDST thou know what true peace and quiet mean ; wouldst thou find a refuge from the noises and clamours of the multitude, come with me into a Quaker's meeting."

No, Charles Lamb ; amongst your Quakers, no doubt, you find peace and quiet ; but there is a peace more profound, a quiet more intense, than you have ever known, for you have not lived in a Convent.

I don't remember who first suggested that I should go into a Convent ; but, whoever it was, at the time I put the idea aside as absurd. However, after a few weeks of bustling, noisy, hotel life in the most depressing part of the Riviera, my imagination began to endow the peace of Convent life with charms that each day became more irresistible ; and before long I found myself treasuring, as a talisman that would put an end to all my annoyances, my letter of introduction to the Lady Superior of a Convent in a little Italian town, a few miles from the French frontier.

I had left England worn out in body and mind, and, as I knew that some months must elapse before there would be any chance of my being able to return, my heart sank at the prospect of passing the time in the midst of this caravanserai of invalids, and I was ready to welcome as a blessing anything that would ensure deliverance from the daily table d'hôte, and the rattling, ever-arriving omnibus.

At length, one evening, driven to despair by the arrival at the hotel of another half-dozen invalids, I wrote to the Lady Superior and asked if she would receive me as a pensionnaire. Her reply manifested none of that alacrity to welcome me which I had expected ; in fact, it was only after some Catholic friends of mine had brought all their influence to bear upon the head of the Order in Paris, that the required permission was sent.

It was about seven o'clock one evening in January that I arrived at Turgia. For one second, when the heavy gate swung back behind me as I entered, and I heard the click of the self-revolving lock, my heart throbbed nervously ; nor did the sight of some dozen figures clothed in long flowing robes, their faces partially hidden by black veils, tend to restore my courage. There was something strange and un-

canny in those silent forms, flitting up and down the long, white corridor. But this feeling vanished in a moment, for the Lady Superior hurried forward to bid me welcome ; and no gloomy foreboding could resist the charm of her manner.

She was a tiny little lady, scarcely five feet in height, with delicate features and white hair. She spoke in a singularly gentle voice that reminded me of a little bell, it was so clear and distinct, and yet so low ; it might have been monotonous if less sweet, but as it was, it seemed to have a strange power of lulling to sleep all irritation. Her manner had all the subtle charm which is the peculiar heritage of well-born Frenchwomen ; for she and all her Order were of that nation, and have only established themselves across the frontier to escape the persecution of the Republican Government. There was such a true ring of motherly friendliness in her welcome, that I soon felt quite at home, and was able to pay proper attention to the exquisite little dinner that had been prepared for me. This I ate alone, for it seemed to be contrary to the regulations of the establishment for the Sisters to eat with strangers. Still, one or two of them never failed to come and keep me company during my repasts just, as they said, to prevent my feeling lonely.

As soon as dinner was over, the Lady Superior took me to my own little cottage, a most charming abode, built by the side of the Convent. It was here that the Bishop of the Diocese was lodged when he paid his pastoral visits to the neighbourhood ; for, as I afterwards discovered, the same prohibition applied to him as to me—the one as a man, though a Bishop, the other as a Protestant, though a woman, might not sleep under the same roof as the Sisters.

It was some days before I became accustomed to the quaint routine of Convent life. At first, the little bells, which at all sorts of odd times and seasons summoned the Sisters to prayer, used to startle me ; but I soon learnt to know them, and they added not a little to the charm of the place. There was something soothing in watching that little black crowd—there were only twenty-five Sisters—rise at the first stroke, and, as if moved by some common impulse which bound all their actions in a bond of perfect harmony, make their way slowly to the little chapel. Then, too, the gentle click of their rosaries as they walked slowly up and down the

garden, counting their beads and speaking not one word, though they might be there for the hour together, ushered in a peace ineffable. During the three months I was there, I never saw a hurried gesture, or heard an angry word ; from first to last, life pursued its smooth, untroubled course—sleepy if you like, but oh, so peaceful ! As you entered you seemed to leave the world behind you ; try as it might, it could not make its way through those iron bars. Inside there was a sort of atmospheric pressure, which lulled to sleep all cares and troubles ; little worldly anxieties looked petty when viewed in the presence of those women, whose lives were set apart from all things worldly ; and politics had an absurdly false ring within the convent walls. I remember, one day, by some chance I brought a newspaper in with me, and I was amused to find myself discovering that its great crackling sheets were almost vulgar, and the thought of reading it in the Convent, a sacrilege.

The Convent is built high up on a hill-side, and is surrounded by a large garden. At the foot of the hill, some few hundred yards beyond the garden, is the Mediterranean, which sparkles and glitters with a thousand colours, as the sun lights up its dark azure with splendour ; whilst above the Convent, the grey-green olive-groves stand out against the clear bright sky. As I laid in that garden, I used often to wonder if any place on the earth could be more lovely. I doubt it.

The garden itself, with its rows of tiny terraces, inclining full south, was a marvel of nature and art. Protected from all cold winds, its flowers assumed a more brilliant hue than those grown elsewhere. A great hedge, tall as a man, of creeping heliotrope, filled the air with fragrant perfume ; an orange grove ran down one side ; on the other, crimson roses and tall lilies vied with each other in beauty. To me, accustomed to grey London skies and all the formal ugliness of a town, the mere fact of living in such a place was happiness, and made my every nerve thrill with pleasure. Then the charm of the society of those gentle ladies, their very remoteness from the world, seemed to increase it ; and the absence of all masculine influence lent to it a peculiar attraction. People, of course, they could not speak of ; as to news, they did not know the meaning of the word ; but, in their long hours of silence they had matured a delicate concentration of thought which I have never encountered elsewhere.

They startled me sometimes by their quaint aphorisms, and by the subtle distinctions they would draw ; it was as if by solitude their minds were become pure as a crystal which, catching the various rays around, reflects them back, illumined with new splendour. I never knew how shallow and superficial I was, how confused was my mind, how unsettled were my principles, until I talked with them.

Although the lives and minds of these good Sisters seemed to move as one harmonious whole, here, as elsewhere, the harmony was the result of diversity, not of uniformity. The Lady Superior's sweetness was never more attractive than when contrasted with the sterner, harder character of her predecessor. This lady had been the head of the community for some years, when the loss of her hearing obliged her to resign her position. Without a moment's hesitation she cheerfully accepted her fate, and insisted upon remaining in the same Convent in a subordinate character. By birth she was a Corsican, and more than once, whilst she was describing the wrongs or sufferings of others, I have seen her eyes flash with a fire of which we colder Northerners are incapable. She had been in Paris during the war, at which time the Convent there had been turned into a hospital, and her face used to light up with enthusiasm as she spoke of the heroic patience with which the wounded men had borne their sufferings. She herself was one of a family of warriors, and, I should say, shared to the full the warlike ardour of her race, though in her it was softened and purified into a longing to help, not to avenge, others.

But of all the inhabitants of the Convent, none appealed to me so strongly as Sister Marie Augustine. In my life I have never seen a more perfect face and form : even the nun's dress could not conceal their beauty. Tall and slight, her every gesture was queenly ; her eyes were large and of the deepest violet ; her delicate patrician features would have been almost too statuesque in their perfect loveliness, if it had not been for the rich lips, and the clear bright colour of her cheeks, which glowed with perfect health. She played the organ with a skill that proved her an accomplished musician ; English and Italian, as well as French she spoke with ease, and I often wondered what could have driven her from a world where she was so well fitted to play a brilliant part. I never dared to ask, but

later I heard accidentally that, immediately before she entered the Convent, she had passed some time at Court as maid of honour to the Empress Eugénie. Had she started back in horror from a world such as she learnt to know it there? Or had some tragedy frightened her away?

Sister Elisabeth was the woman who, intellectually, would be ranked first in a Convent. In any sphere she would have been counted as a distinguished woman. She belonged by birth, as by talent, to a family of lawyers, and it was an endless source of amusement to me to watch her as she sat, perfectly motionless, with her hands clasped together, arguing with lawyer-like acumen some point in dispute. I once did venture to ask her what could have induced her to enter a Convent. For anyone who knew the woman the naïveté of her confession was charming.

In the olden days, before Elisabeth was born, an aunt of hers, the only sister of her mother, had excited the undying enmity of her family by becoming a nun. The home atmosphere being decidedly anti-clerical, this aunt had been held up as an object of the strongest reprobation to Elisabeth's childish imagination; and, from her earliest infancy, it had been impressed upon her by her mother that the one thing she must not do was to become a nun. As her mind was decidedly of the combative order, the natural result of this system of training was that, as soon as she arrived at an age to take the initiative, she began to regard Convent-life somewhat in the light of a forbidden pleasure. Noticing this, her family redoubled their threats and warnings, with the result that, as soon as she attained her majority, she entered a Convent. She was the only one of the Sisters who ever discussed theology with me. The others, with a sort of innate courtesy, tacitly ignored the fact that I was not of the same persuasion as they.

Then there was Sister Blandine, a delicate, consumptive girl, who seemed to be fading away before our eyes. She had lately joined the community; but even Convent life cannot heal a broken heart, and her story, as her fate, was written only too clearly on her face.

Sister Octavie, who was nearly ninety, was the only one who seemed to regret the outside world. If she saw me at my window, with a significant nod she would point to her chaplet. I knew well what was meant; as soon as her string of prayers was said, she would come and pay me a

visit. And then the speed with which she would rattle through those beads, so as not to miss her chat! For, as I soon discovered, their vow of silence was allowed to yield place to their sense of hospitality. I soon knew the history of her life, if life it could be called. She was brought up in a Convent, and when her education was complete, at the request of her friends (no dowry, and therefore no husband, having been found) she took the veil. She could not remember having walked in a street in her life! With this was connected her greatest earthly disappointment. Somethree years before I met her, she had been sent from Dijon to the then new Convent at Turgia. The journey, about forty hours, (it is contrary to their rule to travel express) she went through without stopping, sustained, as she in a moment of confidence told me, by the hope of just for once traversing the streets on foot. But, alas for the frailty of human hopes! The Lady Superior, knowing nothing of the secret longing of Octavie's soul, rashly deciding that a woman of more than eighty, at the end of such a journey, would be only too glad to drive, sent a close carriage to meet her at the railway station. There were tears in the poor old woman's eyes as she said to me: "And now I shall never walk in a street."

Then there was Sister Christine, who sang like an angel; and Sister Bernadine, who was preparing for Mission work in Africa; the others I only knew by sight. I seem to see them still, flitting up and down the silent terraces. Are they happy, I often wonder. I think they are; at least as far as they knew the meaning of the word. In these days of altruism one cannot call their life ideal; but surely it is not altogether wasted, for are not those gentle Sisters teaching a lesson of tender peace and love, and offering to those who seek it, a safe and sure refuge from the noises and clamours of the world?

CHRONICLES OF SCOTTISH COUNTIES.

BUTE AND DUMBARTON.

BETWEEN the classic shore of Ayr and the long, lone promontory of Kintyre lies the Isle of Arran, an outlying morsel of the Highlands. A delightful island with wild Alpine scenery, and a bold rocky coast, partly encompassed with a rim or

margin of lower ground which forms a charming marine terrace, that has the appearance of a raised sea-beach. Between this terrace and the rocky barrier behind it, lie cliffs and caverns, rifts and wooded dells, with brooks rushing down in foaming cascades, and pleasant valleys, where winter frosts and snows rarely penetrate—a country of soft mists and wild showers, and bright sunny gleams, full of contrast and charm. Although the mountains rise to no great height compared with Alpine summits, yet their grand bulk and rugged outline, as they rise sheer from the level of the waves, give an impression of grandeur and sublimity. The chief summit, known as Goat Fell, bears in Gaelic the more impressive title of Gaoth Cheinn (The Mountain of Winds), and well deserves the title, as it rears its massive front to the wild Atlantic gales.

Although Arran, like most of the western isles, underwent a period of subjugation to the Scandinavian hordes, yet it never lost its Gaelic character. The legends of the island are those of the Gael—of Fiunn Maccul, his battles and his victories. Ossian ended his days at Kilmorie, according to island tradition, and missionaries from the neighbouring coast of Ireland made of Arran another island of the saints.

The lordship of the island eventually fell to the Stewarts through a marriage with a female descendant of the mighty Somerled, and from this circumstance it happens that Arran, with other isles that dot the Firth of Clyde—the Cumbracs Great and Little, Inchmarnock, and Pladda—all of which, at one time or other, owned the Stewarts as lords, were united with Bute to form a separate county. Holy Island, too, must be added, a little satellite of Arran lying in Lamlash Bay, which takes its name from an eremitic settlement of holy men, founded by Molios—the name signifies in Gaelic one who had adopted the tonsure of Jesus—a disciple of Columba, who found the lonely island of Iona too gay and festive for his taste, and so retired to complete solitude in this isle, which had no other occupants than the sea-birds. The cave in which he lived is still to be seen, and is adorned with certain Runic inscriptions; while a raised slab of rock, without any luxurious adaptations to the human frame, such as the sybarites of Iona sometimes indulged in, is pointed out as the bed of the saint. His bath, too, is in existence—and it is a redeeming feature in

his case that he did not allow himself the luxury of dirt—and this was once much resorted to by pilgrims from all parts, while all kinds of cures were effected by a dip in the holy man's bath. In later times a small monastery was built upon the island; and when the monastery fell to ruins, the graveyard was still made use of by the people of the main isle; till one day a funeral party were caught in a sudden storm on the passage and all drowned, after which there were no more burials on Holy Isle.

On Arran itself are many memorials of an earlier civilisation than our own: memorial stones; Druidic circles; cinerary urns; cairns which enclose the bones of mighty men of old; forts which have been held by tribe against tribe, in the ages of stone and of bronze. Among the latter is the Doon, a vast primeval fortress protected on the seaward side by cliffs three hundred feet high. Nor are relics of a golden age altogether wanting. Here and there have come to light the golden torques and collars for which Ireland was once so famous—although such finds are more likely to have reached the melting pot than the museum.

The island is still full of the memory of the Bruce. The King's cave, among the rocks on the shore of the island opposite Campbelltown in Kintyre, is said to have sheltered the Bruce and his followers when landed from their winter retreat at Rachrin on the Irish coast; and here James Douglas, a fugitive like the King, recognised the King's presence by the winding of his horn.

Dead were my heart, and deaf mine ear,
If Bruce should call, nor Douglas hear!

From Brodick Bay, on the other side of the island, King Robert set sail for his own land of Carrick, encouraged by the signal fire that blazed from Turnberry Point, on the opposite coast of Ayr. The old castle of Brodick, that witnessed all this, still remains, an unlucky castle for defence, if its annals are correctly written. First James Douglas stormed it, and put its English garrison to the sword, before his meeting with the Bruce. A century later, in the Douglas wars, it fell into the hands of Balloch of the Isles, who plundered Arran, and laid it waste, as it was then the private domain of the Stuarts. Again, nearly a century afterwards, that is A.D. 1544, the castle was attacked and dismantled by the Earl of Lennox, who came with English ships on

an expedition against his native land. Another century elapsed, and then Cromwell sent a garrison of eighty men to Brodick and ordered a stout bastion to be built for its defence—a bastion which still exists, and forms a principal part of the ancient edifice. Here were the saints once more in the Island of the Saints, but they hardly behaved as such. Anyhow, the Highland tradition goes that the strangers found the daughters of the land too fair for their peace of mind and good manners, and that, jealous of their behaviour, the islanders rose upon them, cut them off from their castle, and slew them everyone. Again a century passed away, or nearly, and in 1746, although there was no question of defending the castle, yet the redcoat lads with black cockades were searching everywhere for fugitive Jacobites, one of whom, the Hon. Charles Boyd, was concealed on Auchcliffin Farm, till he found a chance of escaping to France. This was a younger son of the Lord Kilmarnock, who had suffered not long before on Tower Hill.

Since those days, however, the Highland element in the population of Arran has been much reduced. The Gael has gone westward—man by man, family by family—sometimes, as in 1830, in large parties. In that year there was a general emigration to Canada and Chaleur Bay. Lowland cultivators have taken the place of Highland cottars, and under assiduous cultivation the land is quickly losing the traces of earlier and ruder times.

Crossing the Sound of Bute, the blue mountains of Arran, rising in their grand bulk from the placid, land-locked sea, form an impressive and noble object as we look behind us. It is the scene which met the eyes of Bruce and his followers, as having dragged their galleys over the narrow neck of land at Tarbet, they steered for Arran's Isle :

The sun, ere yet he sunk behind
Ben Ghoil, the Mountain of the Wind,
Gave his grim peaks a greeting kind,
And bade Loch Ranza smile.

Still, under summer skies, there is no more lovely scene than this, beheld under the effects of a glowing sunset.

Each puny wave in diamonds rolled
O'er the calm deep, where hues of gold
With azure strove and green.
The hill, the vale, the tree, the tower,
Glowed with the tints of evening's hour,
The beach was silver sheen.

The tower, perhaps, whose ruins rise above Loch Ranza, was not in existence in Bruce's days, being an old hunting seat

of the earlier Stuarts, with whom the Isle of Arran was a favourite resort. It was James the Second who alienated the islands of Bute and Arran, and bestowed them in dower upon his eldest sister, the Princess Margaret, on her marriage with Sir Thomas Boyd. The marriage was not a success; and the Princess was divorced, and bestowed, with her magnificent dowry, upon Sir James, the chief of the Hamiltons, who, by deserting his patron the Douglas on the eve of battle, had probably saved the King's crown, and so earned this large reward—large, that is, in landed endowments; whether the Princess herself turned out reward or punishment, does not appear on record. Perhaps if Hamilton had boasted of having married the eldest sister of the King, he might have been met with the rejoinder that, if the King had had one older still, he would have given her to him. Anyhow, this historic episode accounts for the extensive possessions of the Hamiltons in the county of Bute.

Right in the track for the Kyles of Bute is the small, low-lying Inchmarnock, the last retreat of the saint, whose anchorite's cell gave its name to Kilmarnock, on the adjoining mainland of Ayr. The Kyles themselves resemble rather a winding, placid river than an arm of the sea, and Bute is distinguished more for mild and pastoral beauty than for any striking features. Rothesay, the capital of the county and island, is the chief watering-place of the Firth of Clyde, generally packed with visitors in the summer time, and a favourite residence with Glasgow people all the year round. Along all the adjoining shores, indeed, the villas and mansions of the cotton and iron lords are thickly planted. Swarms of yachts, of pleasure boats and skiffs, ride at anchor in the Firth, and are harboured in every nook and cranny along the shore. And thus the ancient fame of Rothesay—which gave the title of Duke to the heir of the Stuart line, a title now borne by the Prince of Wales as their representative—and its ancient history, seem of little account in comparison with the interests of the day. The castle is fine and fairly well preserved; an ancient seat of the Stuarts, before the island passed out of their direct lordship. Its present ruined state is due to the Earl of Argyle, or anyhow to his partisans, who set fire to the castle and burned all that would burn in the course of the unfortunate rising of 1685, the result of

which brought the Earl and many of his friends to the scaffold.

At one time Bute was the scene of considerable traffic with the Highlands. A series of ferries crossing the Firth from Argyle to Bute, from Bute to Cumbræs Isles, and then to the neighbouring shores of Ayrshire, formed the easiest and most expeditious route from the Western Highlands to Galloway, and the English borders. Thus Bute was considered neutral ground, neither Highland nor Lowland, where all might meet at fair or market without mistrust or national jealousy.

The Firth of Clyde, upon which we are now embarked, was once better known as the Firth of Dumbarton. For when Glasgow was a mere kirk-town—a seat of learning indeed and of ecclesiastical dignity, but without wealth or commerce, and of no military importance—Dumbarton lorded it over the whole firth, in virtue of its royal castle, one of the strongholds of the realm, and its royal burgh ranking with the most ancient and illustrious municipalities of the period.

The history of Dumbarton ascends to the dim and mythic Celtic period of Arthur and his Knights, of Merlin wild, and the legends of the Table Round. It is Dinas-y-Brython, the fortress of the Briton, and was known earlier still as Alclwyd, as which it figures in the poems of Ossian, and among the legends of Fiunn, the Gael. Here, too, was probably a frontier post under the Roman occupation, for hereabouts ended the so-called Wall of Antoninus, the extreme mark of Roman domination in Britain; and no doubt the facilities of defence on all sides, and of access from the sea, marked out the rock of Dumbarton as the site of a strong fortress. It is probable that the whole county of Dumbarton represents a portion of the ancient British Kingdom of Strathclyde, which stretched as far as the waters of Loch Lomond. For the district still bears in an altered form its ancient British name—not Gaelic at all, but Welsh. It was the Llanerch or plain; the wedge of cultivated country surrounded by the hills and waters; and as the Lennox it is still known—the origin of a title which has been noted, if not illustrious, in the annals of Scotland and England.

The first known Lord of Lennox was no Norman Knight, but a true-born Englishman. Among the Northumbrian chiefs who went into exile rather than submit to the Norman invader, was one

Arkil, son of Egfrith, on whom King Malcolm, mindful of what he owed the Northumbrian chiefs in that affair of Macbeth, bestowed the Lordship of Lennox. Alwyn, the grandson of Arkil, was first known as Earl of Lennox, who died A.D. 1160, and from that time to the reign of Charles the Second, the line ran on by male or female descent. The Earl of Lennox was naturally the guardian of Dumbarton Burgh and Castle, that is, when he could be trusted, for such an important stronghold was often confided to someone specially appointed by the King.

The burgh itself was well qualified to look after its own interests. Its privileges were acknowledged by Alexander the Second in a charter dated 1221. But about forty years later the very existence of the town was endangered by a most formidable Scandinavian invasion. Haco, King of Norway, with a powerful fleet and a terrible force of yellow-haired warriors from all parts, appeared in the Firth of Clyde. Magnus, King of Man, was serving under the orders of his brother monarch of Norway, and all the vassal chiefs of the Hebrides were with him. The terrified inhabitants of Lennox took refuge, with all their moveable belongings, upon the islands in Loch Lomond, and having secured all the boats in the loch, awaited the event in tolerable security. But the King of Man passed up Loch Long with sixty galleys, and reaching the head of the loch, the Norsemen dragged their galleys across the narrow isthmus that divides the sea water from the fresh, and then launching their craft in Loch Lomond, descended exultingly upon the defenceless islands. Then followed terrible slaughter, fire and pillage, till, sated with destruction and loaded with booty, the Scandinavians returned by the way they had come, and rejoined the main body of the fleet. Happily for the Scotch Kingdom, a great storm scattered Haco's fleet, and the battle of Largs, fought on the Ayrshire coast, completed the ruin of the invaders.

Through all these troubles the Castle of Dumbarton seems to have held out. The rock was held to be impregnable in the days before gunpowder; but, seen from the Clyde, it has rather a pleasant than a formidable appearance—a sturdy, double-headed rock, with grassy, sloping terraces and ivy-covered walls. On the lower ground behind it lies the town, shrouded in a sultry reek; for Dumbarton is now a manufacturing and shipbuilding centre, and

the clang of hammers and boiler-plates may be heard all day long. It is difficult to realise that this homely-looking fortress, little more than a pleasant retreat for war-worn veterans, could ever have held the fate of Scotland in its hands. But it is said that at the time when the succession to the Crown was disputed, and it seemed an even chance whether Douglas or Stuart should prevail, the Governor of Dumbarton turned the scale by declaring for the Stuarts, as the rhyming chronicle of Wynton relates.

Robert Stewart was made King
Specially throw the helping
Of gude Sir Robert of Erskine,
That Edinburgh, Dumbarton, and Strivelin,
Had in his keeping.

For one thing, Dumbarton was nearly always open to communication with Scotland's ancient ally of France. The Firth of Forth was often blockaded by English ships of war; and even were the firth open, the ships of the French, sailing from the naval depôts on the Seine, would have to run the gauntlet of the Straits of Dover and the Cinque Ports, whence armed vessels were always ready to sally forth. But the west coast of England was far less efficiently guarded, and with an east wind—and there is no reason to believe that such a wind blew less persistently then than now, although we hear less about it in the chronicles of the period—the passage is as easy, and not much longer, from the Seine to the Clyde, as to the eastern Forth.

Anyhow, by way of Dumbarton often came supplies from France in the way of arms, wine, and general merchandise, and very opportunely at times. The Stuarts seem to have had friendly relations with France, even when only High Stewards of the Kingdom. Perhaps their official functions had something to do with providing good wine of Bordeaux for the Royal household, and so they had established friendly commercial relationship with the merchants of France. At all events, in the later Baliol wars, in the time of Edward the Third of England, when Robert Stewart held Dumbarton, and captured the Castle of Dunoon from the enemy, he received arms and supplies from France.

Another incident shows Dumbarton in its capacity of State prison. King David the Second had been a prisoner for eleven years in England, after the battle of Neville's Cross; at first in close captivity in the Tower, but afterwards at greater

liberty at Odiham Castle in Hampshire. This liberty he employed in winning the affections of a charming girl from Wales, one Catherine Mortimer. The lady accompanied the King on his return to his dominions; but the rude nobility of Scotland took umbrage at the distinction with which Catherine was treated, and the Earl of Angus was deputed to abate the grievance, which he did most effectually by waylaying and putting to death the unfortunate young woman. For this crime he was sent a prisoner to Dumbarton, and there the matter would have ended, had not a visitation of the plague in the following year carried off both prisoners and gaolers.

Another curious episode in the history of Dumbarton Castle is its being held by a priest, one Walter de Danyelstone, during the Regency of Robert, Duke of Albany. The priest, who no doubt had some authority from the King to command the castle, refused to give it up to Albany except to be made Bishop of St. Andrews, and the bargain was actually made and carried out. There would have been nothing extraordinary in such an arrangement on behalf of a fighting priest in the thirteenth century; but in the fifteenth, it certainly strikes one as remarkable. About this time the succession to the honours of Lennox ended in a woman, the Lady Isabel, who eventually married Murdoch, Duke of Albany, the son and successor of the above Robert, but who, gifted with a temper too amiable and placable for the times, came to a bad end upon the heading hill at Stirling. The widowed Lady Isabel returned to her own country and lived for many years in retirement in Inchmurren, an islet in Loch Lomond, where stood one of the family seats. Judging from the remains at present existing, the Lady Isabel's household accommodation must have been very limited; but we are told that she lived here in some state, surrounded by relations and dependants; and we can only conjecture that following generations were at some pains to convey away the building materials, or, as is more probable, that much of her Ladyship's dwelling was a mere temporary erection of wood and thatch. But, anyhow, Lady Isabel's name has come down to us as that of a pious and charitable woman, who founded the Collegiate Church of Dumbarton, and devoted much of her means to pious uses.

On the death of this distinguished lady, the Darnley branch of the Lennox family

claimed, and eventually obtained, the Earldom and the greater part of its possessions; and this line of Earls of Lennox ran on indifferently well, with a general character for stoutness, wisdom, and valour, till on the death of James the Fifth we find Matthew, then Earl of Lennox, in possession of the fortress of Dumbarton, and expecting the arrival of the French fleet with arms and reinforcements for the support of the cause of the Queen-mother, Mary of Guise. But before the fleet arrived, Lennox had changed his mind. He recognised the great wealth and power of England under King Henry the Eighth; and he judged probably that the English monarch's plan of obtaining possession of the person of the infant Queen and bringing her up under English influences as a wife for his son Edward was really the best arrangement for both nations. Thus he fled to the English Court, and was rewarded by King Henry with the hand of his niece, the Lady Margaret Douglas. Presently Lennox was entrusted with the command of an expedition against his native land. He sailed from Bristol with twelve ships fitted out at that port, and, after visiting Arran, came to the Firth of Dumbarton and demanded admittance as its lawful Governor.

But the Commander of the castle refused to admit the Earl, who, finding the castle too strong for attack, departed as he came, and returned to Bristol. Soon after the French fleet arrived with "two thousand gunnaris, three hundred barbit horse, two hundred archeris of the gaird," besides a plentiful supply of silver crowns, all which were landed at Dumbarton, and were very comforting to the French party in Scotland.

Then some three years afterwards the little Queen Mary arrived at Dumbarton on her way to France. Bluff King Harry was now nearing his end, and perhaps the watch kept upon the Scottish coast was somewhat relaxed; but still it was found impossible to embark the prisoners in the Forth, where Monsieur de Villegaignon was lying with a French fleet. But it was arranged that he should steal round the northern coast with four galleys, and so he passed the stormy Pentland Firth, and reached Dumbarton in safety. Villegaignon and the Seneschal of Normandy, Mons. de Brézé, received the little child on board with all respect. There was a touching parting between mother and daughter on the grassy sward beneath the

castle. The child was only just recovering from an attack of small-pox—perhaps it was only the chicken-pox after all, for the beauty of her features and complexion struck all beholders—she wept long and silently, as the convoy sailed away. It was a sorrowful beginning for a life destined to be full of sorrow.

Many years elapsed, and Lennox was still an exile in England, well satisfied indeed with the state of an English nobleman wedded to a Princess of the Royal house. His son Henry had inherited the physical perfections and moral defects of Stuart, Douglas, and Tudor, and the young widowed Queen of France and Scotland, who had lately returned to her own realm, bethought her that a match with this splendid-looking youth might reconcile both inclination and policy. And thus, in 1563, the long-exiled Lennox was "relaxit fra the proces of our souerane lady's horne," and permitted to revisit his ancestral estates, bringing with him his son for the approval of his Royal mistress.

But all this has little to do with our castle at Dumbarton, and yet the destinies of Earl and Queen and Castle were somehow mixed up together. For after Darnley's murder, and when the Queen had just escaped from Loch Leven, it was in the foolish attempt to reach the Castle of Dumbarton that the Queen's party suffered the fatal defeat of Langside. The castle held out for the Queen even after she had become a captive in England, but was taken at last by a daring escalade. Amongst the prisoners was Archbishop Hamilton, the last of the Abbots of Paisley, who had hastily donned helmet and shirt of mail in the alarm of the assault. The Archbishop was forthwith hanged at Stirling by the Confederate Lords. But the Hamiltons had an old-fashioned sense of the strictness of family ties and of the duty of blood revenge, and Lennox, who was then Regent, fell soon after in the raid of Stirling, a victim to the shade of the Archbishop.

Another notable prisoner at Dumbarton was the Regent Morton, who fell a victim to his political enemies, ostensibly for being "art and part" in the murder of Henry Darnley; and after this we do not hear much about Dumbarton till the days of the Covenant, when the Castle was seized by the Covenanting Provost of the burgh, who obtained possession of it by a simple but ingenious stratagem. The Governor of the Castle, according to custom,

attended service one Sunday at the town kirk. Provost Sempill waited upon His Excellency, and requested the favour of his company to dinner. The Governor hesitated, but the Provost insisted, and Sir William was hustled into the Provost's lodgings and quickly made to see that he was a prisoner. The keys of the castle were taken from him; the countersign obtained under threat of instant death; and in the dusk of the evening, one of the Covenanting party, dressed in the garb which had been stripped from the unfortunate Governor, presented himself at the castle postern with a few friends, gave the word, was admitted with due respect, and forthwith took possession for the Lords of the Covenant. The castle changed hands again but was in the possession of the Covenanters after the battle of Philiphaugh, when a number of Irish prisoners were cruelly put to death there. But the importance of the castle as a military fort was even then only of a sentimental nature; and although by the treaty of union, a garrison must always be maintained there, yet it hardly ranks as a serious defence of the Firth of Clyde.

As well as the old house of Lennox, the Colquhouns have had an important share in local history, and their annals are diversified with feuds and battles with neighbouring Highland clans. One of the most fatal of these contests was a battle in Glen Fruin, with the wild Macgregors early in the seventeenth century, when the Colquhouns were defeated with a loss of over a hundred fighting men. A number of scholars from the Free School of Dumbarton, it is said, had come out to see the fight, and were set upon by some of the Macgregors and slain in cold blood. It is due, however, to the latter clan, who were gallant fellows after all, although harried and worried by all the powers of the State, to record that the foul deed was indignantly repudiated by the clan in general, and that the perpetrators were outlawed even by the outlawed Macgregors themselves.

But the Vale of Leven has more peaceful memories than these. Here was the birth-place and early home of Tobias Smollett, the author of "Roderick Random" and "Peregrine Pickle," who was descended from a family of lairds long established in the neighbourhood of Dumbarton. And in the portraits of Matthew Bramble and his family, the novelist is said to have reproduced the lineaments of his own family connections.

UNCLE BOB'S NIECE.

By LESLIE KEITH.

Author of "The Chilcotts," etc.

CHAPTER III.

SOME ten minutes after the cab had rolled out of sight and hearing, there came a young man that way—a young man who looked about him as one to whom the scene was familiar.

He had a brisk, cheerful air, and he softly hummed a popular melody under his breath. He looked as if the world went well with him; as if he dined satisfactorily every night of his life, and went to a theatre afterwards. In the meantime he was going to "five o'clock," as he would have phrased it, with Mrs. Popham; and, if one might judge from his walk, he did not face the prospect reluctantly. But then Fred Temple was always ready to enter any door that led to society. Society is confessedly not serious, and Temple used to say, with the most charming candour, that he loved to be frivolous. It was his misfortune, and not his fault, that for certain hours every day he had to devote himself to the service of his country, in the Patents Office. Perpetual motion was the subject which engrossed this butterfly, and it afforded scope for much humour on the part of his friends.

"So ridiculous!" he would murmur to himself. "The only motion I would choose to perpetuate would be a waltz with a charming partner."

Something of this he said to Mrs. Popham when he got into the bright flower-scented drawing-room.

Mrs. Popham looked rather reproachful. She was a little woman, too thin, except for an age that has revived the pre-Raphaelite type, but she was carefully dressed, and passed for something less than her forty years. Mrs. Popham's dancing days were over, she averred, though to those who knew her pliant order of mind, there was hope that they might one day return. Fred Temple said as much, but he put it more neatly. It was a pleasure to him to be artistic; perhaps a greater pleasure than to be sincere.

"Never," she said, "never. Life is too precious to waste, and there are so many things one wants to know."

"There is one thing I want to know," said Temple, sitting forward in his chair,

and looking very bright. He was slim, and tall, and dark; with lively eyes, and smiling lips which a slight, black moustache did not conceal. The smile had frequently a good-humoured flavour of scorn, which removed it from mere vacuous amiability, and gave you the impression that he found himself quite equal to most people, and possibly superior to some. The superiority did not peep out aggressively, however, and he was usually voted rather an ornamental and agreeable young fellow.

"Oh, don't ask me," said Mrs. Popham with humility. "I am only a learner. But I have had a manifestation. I want to tell you about it."

"But first tell me, please, how I came to find this on your threshold."

Temple took a sprig of flower from his button-hole, and held it out to her.

"What is it?" asked his hostess, peering at it with short-sighted eyes. She felt helplessly for her eyeglass.

"It is a happy omen; it is luck, rare good luck, embodied in this bit of white heather. Don't ask me to relinquish it. Good fortune treats me so scurvily, and this comes, like all the good things of my life, from you."

She took it between her fingers, and peered at it closely, not heeding his gallant phrases.

"Why," she said at last, in an accent of certainty, "that child must have left it."

"What child?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Popham, suddenly realising all that she had relinquished, "how I wish I had not sent her away! How I wish I had asked her to come in! If it hadn't been that I wanted to see you so particularly! You would have told me whether she would do."

She again sought vaguely for her eyeglass, and, securing it at last, adjusted it, and looked at him with a naïve anxiety on her thin little face.

Fred Temple smiled. It was his belief that women were born incoherent, and he had a great deal of patience. When you have no apparent income, and are yet a lover of society, you need to have a large reserve fund of patience. Fred Temple was a mystery, whom people accepted because they had got tired of speculating about him without result. He always dressed well, and was seen everywhere, and his judgement was accepted without question on matters of taste; yet nobody knew whence he came nor to whom he belonged, nor yet from what source flowed

the income that paid his tailor's bills. It did not come from the Patents Office, that was quite certain. A man who is so bereft of traditions must necessarily exercise some tact to succeed, and Fred Temple succeeded.

He got almost everything out of life that he asked from it, and what more could birth or wealth have done for him? His own skill used to afford him a good deal of inward humour, and a pleasing sense of acuteness. He proceeded now to unravel the entanglement of Mrs. Popham's thoughts.

"In the first place," he said, "who is this benevolent fairy that scatters her gifts on your threshold?"

"Thomas said the old man was very rude—quite abusive," said Mrs. Popham, beginning to explain in her own way. "Think of that!" she clasped her hands together.

"I thought," said Fred, under his breath, "that it was a child."

"Oh, not such a child—nineteen or twenty, I should say; but in the North people keep looking young much longer."

"Then this message comes from the North?" he twisted the flower, which he had again taken into his possession, lightly round between his finger and thumb.

"Didn't I tell you?" said Mrs. Popham staring. "I am sure I told you," and thereupon she began to tell him all over again.

Temple knew her very well, and he let her talk, with only an assisting question now and then. Mrs. Popham's conversation ran somewhat in this wise:

"It was in the North—at least I don't know if you would call it North—but Liliesmuir is in Scotland, so it must be North, mustn't it? It was summer, you know; perhaps July, or it might be August. Yes, I remember now it was August, because I had to go into mourning for my cousin Northcote. The date is on his tombstone in Kensal Green."

"Shall we go there and fix it beyond doubt?" Fred asked gravely.

"I daresay Elise could tell me," said Mrs. Popham, all unconscious of his irony. "She had to get my mourning, you know. I sent her to Edinburgh for it: as it was only a cousin, it didn't so much matter."

It will be seen that Temple needed to draw largely on his stock of patience, and to exercise some acumen in sifting the wheat from the chaff of this narrative.

He leaned back in his chair and looked

at his hostess with an amused smile in his dark eyes. He steered her back quite skilfully when she threatened to wander too far afield, and somehow or other, in fragments neatly patched together, he managed to construct the whole story satisfactorily to himself.

It was quite a pretty little romance as he pictured it in the warm, flower-fragrant room, this young girl's adventure out of the North with a talisman in her hand.

"I know something of Scotland," he said with a laugh. "Its people are the most self-opinionated in creation. I dare-say that old fellow thought he was doing you a favour in coming at all."

"Thomas said he seemed to expect to be asked to dine—a man I never saw!"

"What presumption!" Temple laughed again, showing his white teeth. He understood Mrs. Popham so well, and knew so exactly how to estimate the strength and length of her enthusiasms, that he found something deliciously naïve in the absolute faith that had brought those two wanderers to her door in simple reliance on her promise to receive them.

He amused himself with this awhile before he said—"But you invited the daughter—granddaughter—which is it?"

"Niece."

"The niece to visit you?"

"Oh yes, I asked her to come, and I don't mind having her. I am quite willing to have her. I want to have her," cried Mrs. Popham, fanning the flame of her benevolence till it began to glow again. "But she came so suddenly—as if she had dropped from the clouds. I hadn't a moment to think—and then, you were coming."

"I am sorry that my coming should have hindered your meeting," said Temple, sincerely wishing he had come ten minutes earlier. It was a charming little episode, and he would have liked to see the heroine of it. Really Mrs. Popham had managed rather badly, and he did not feel so grateful as he ought to have done for the preference that left him master of the situation. He would have been quite willing to divide the honours with this strange guest, who came out of the mists and vanished into them again, leaving, in token of her presence, the white flower he held in his hand.

"I wanted to tell you about that manifestation"—Mrs. Popham had just been made a member of the Society for Psychological Research—"we have got a most remarkable clue."

"Yes," said Temple pleasantly. "I must come some evening soon and hear all about it. It would be wronging the spirits to crowd their concerns into the ten minutes which is all I dare allow myself just now."

"I thought you were going to dine with me."

"Unfortunately I must deny myself that pleasure too. We toilers cannot choose, unhappily."

Any one who knew Fred Temple well, or even those who knew him but slightly, would have understood at once that this insinuated plea of work was a mere pretence to cover his disinclination. He did not himself wish it to be taken for more. "You can't be positively rude," he would say genially. "You must give your refusal some kind of a garment, even if it be but a rag, to cover its nakedness."

Perpetual motion released him at four o'clock, and even boots and washing appliances—which also belonged to his department—ceased to haunt him when the office doors closed upon him. So when he refused Mrs. Popham's invitation to dine, it was simply because he felt he could amuse himself better elsewhere. If the little Scotch girl had been present, it would have been another affair; but in her absence the ghosts were certain to reign, and it was not Temple's will at the moment to be bored by any such topic. So he put on a grave expression and said contritely:

"I am so sorry. I feel as if Miss Burton would never forgive me for keeping her from you. And now I must go away. Perhaps it isn't too late yet—"

"Too late to send for her?" Mrs. Popham grasped eagerly at this idea. "I wonder if she would come! You will stay and see her?"

Temple looked thoughtful. He was so good an actor that he threw himself thoroughly into the part he happened to be playing, and he now began seriously to consider whether the nature of his engagements would allow him this indulgence; but at this moment Mrs. Popham made the discovery that Tilly and her angry uncle had left no address, nor had they thrown out any hope of their return.

The footman, when summoned and questioned, could give no information beyond that already drawn from him in cross-examination. When he had shut the door upon the old gentleman's anger, Thomas had gone down to tea, and had

considered the matter no further except as a good story to amuse the cook, and impress her with the valour of his behaviour under attack.

"You didn't notice which way they went?" Temple asked.

"No, sir, I didn't. The young lady looked very frightened, sir; but the old gentleman hurried her off before she could speak."

Now that they were gone, vanished beyond view, Mrs. Popham began to realise what an opportunity she had lost.

Temple, for ends of his own, artfully fanned the dying embers of that old-time enthusiasm, till it glowed with more than its early heat. Every moment Tilly's remembered charms grew in number, every moment Mrs. Popham became more Scotch in sentiment and feeling, till she had almost persuaded herself that she had thrown away the happiness of her life in shutting her door on Tilly.

"It shouldn't be so very difficult to find them," said Temple, beginning now to console. "They seem to be tolerably well-marked figures. Will you describe them again?"

"You will find them?" cried Mrs. Popham, clasping her thin hands, and puckering her brows into an anxious frown.

"Yes, I will find them," he replied with a laugh. "The man is old, you say——"

"Oh, I don't know anything about him," she said, dismissing him carelessly, "except that he has adopted Tilly."

"That's something."

"They say he has come home to settle, and that he made heaps and heaps of money abroad; but I know nothing more about him."

"Why, that's everything," asserted this worldly young fellow. "If a man is rich, you don't want to know anything more about him. It's a character in itself."

"But if he is very rough—you won't like that!" she said, with unexpected shrewdness.

"Nobody can be rough when he is so well gilded!" cried Temple gaily. "Now, look here. You know their address in Scotland?"

"Tilly lived with her cousin at the Manse. I might write there. I will do it now, if you can wait."

"I can wait," said her guest. "After

all, though there are only about a dozen hotels they'd be likely to choose among, it would be the quickest way in the end to get their address from home."

He walked about the room while Mrs. Popham sat down to her writing-table, and dashed off a little note sufficiently full of underlined words and exclamation points and incoherent beseechings to startle the Rev. Mr. Sinclair out of his native phlegm.

Mrs. Popham emphasised the necessity of hearing by return of post, and got up from her chair feeling that her arms were already about Tilly's neck.

"You will post it yourself?" she asked, as Temple bade her good-night.

"I will post it myself."

"And even if Mr. Sinclair should not know where they have gone, you will find them?"

"I will find them," he said with confident gaiety, "and all the reward I will claim will be this sprig of heather."

He had begun his investigation out of a sense of amusement; but now his curiosity was piqued, and he felt himself almost as enthusiastic over the quest as Mrs. Popham herself.

As he went briskly to his club, he entertained some very pleasing visions, and saw himself as in a show, walking through scenes in which he modestly played the part of hero. A doting, foolish old Creslus, and a pretty young girl, unversed in the ways of the wily old world, and he the link that restored them to friendship; their adviser, consoler, confidant—a pleasing vision, truly!

He paused when he reached the highway to look back upon the peaceful darkness of the street he had left behind. Lights glimmered from the stately houses; a blaze from Mrs. Popham's uncurtained windows seemed to beckon the wanderers to return, but no soft footfall sounded on the pavement; no questioning blue eyes looked into his. Big London had swallowed Tilly up, and there was nothing of her left but the token that had fallen at his feet.

He felt with a hand under his great-coat. Yes, the flower was there, lying snug near his heart. He smiled to himself as his fingers touched it.

Good fortune was coming to him at last!